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THE COERCION BILL.

THE Coercion Bill of 1887 can best be appreciated by comparison with the Home-Rule Bill of 1886.

The condition of Ireland during the interval has not altered. There was an absence of crime in Ireland which was exceptional among civilized nations when Mr. Gladstone, last year, proposed the Home-Rule Bill ; and the same virtue and peace prevailed up to the introduction of the Coercion Bill.

It is true that the charge of “increased agrarian crime” was boldly made by Chief Secretary Balfour “from his fortnight’s knowledge of Ireland,” in introducing the bill ; but the charge was made without detail, and it was torn to shreds next day by Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Parnell. For the years 1885 and 1886 the “agrarian crimes” of Ireland, reported by the constabulary, were divided into two heads—“threatening letters” and “offenses other than threatening letters.” In 1885 there were 432 threatening letters reported, while in 1886 the number had risen to 507. But an increase of 65 threatening letters, the authors of which usually belong to three classes, schoolboys, weak-minded persons, and agents of the Government, is surely not good reason for abolishing civilized government in Ireland. Of offenses “other than threatening letters,” there were reported 512 in 1885, and 518 in 1886—an increase of six in a population of five millions !

But compare the two bills : One bill offers Ireland more liberty and more good will than England has offered since the invasion in the Eleventh century. The other contains more menace, more open oppression and degradation than Ireland has had to endure since the Coercion Act of 1703, which, in Mr. Lecky’s words, “abolished” the Catholic landlords of Ireland, and reduced the Catholic tenants to a position of abject and hopeless serfdom.

If Ireland deserved this Tory Coercion, Mr. Gladstone was

blindly unwise to offer Home Rule ; but if Ireland deserved Home Rule in 1886, the Tory Crimes Bill is indeed a Tory Crime in 1887.

“The Government of Ireland Bill” of 1886 opened with these words :

1. On and after the appointed day, there shall be established in Ireland a Legislature consisting of Her Majesty the Queen and an Irish Legislative Body.

2. With the exceptions, and subject to the restrictions in this act mentioned, it shall be lawful for Her Majesty the Queen, by and with the advice of the Irish Legislative Body, to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of Ireland, and by any such law to alter and repeal any law in Ireland.

The Coercion Bill of 1887 strips Ireland of every vestige of civil right, and relegates her to the condition of a province guilty of some vast disorder or rebellion.

“It is the worst law ever proposed for Ireland by any Minister of England,” says John Dillon, M. P.

“It practically suspends trial by jury forever !” says John Morley, M. P.

“It is one of the most shameful and indefensible violations of liberty that has been attempted by any Government within the last generation,” says Charles Bradlaugh, M. P.

“In the name of real union and in the interest of true order, we condemn it,” says Campbell Bannerman, ex-Irish Chief Secretary.

“In resisting this deplorable proposal,” says Mr. Gladstone, “we are serving the cause of Ireland, and still more effectually serving the cause of Great Britain and of its world-wide empire.”

“It is a grave conspiracy by which it is intended on the one side to coerce, if possible, the tenants of Ireland into the payment of impossible rents, and on the other side to compel the purchase of the landlord’s interest at exorbitant prices, which compulsion, if successful, will most certainly lead to repudiation on a wholesale scale,” says Mr. Parnell.

Referring to its indefinite duration, Mr. Gladstone said : “It makes our blood run cold. I do not think it possible for the wit of man to devise a scheme more likely to aggravate any mischief that exists in Ireland, and to stimulate to the uttermost international hatred.”

To avoid misrepresentation of this extraordinary measure, to understand its full purpose, and to observe the consternation and derision with which it was received in Parliament by English

and Irish Liberals and Nationalists, the following extract is given from Chief Secretary Balfour's speech introducing the bill on the night of March 28th (Report of the Dublin *Freeman's Journal*) :

" I now come to the bills which the Government propose to bring in. I have said the courts of law have difficulty in getting evidence, and also in getting verdicts according to the evidence, and we have a special provision—namely, the plan by which magistrates may examine witnesses on oath, even where no person is before them, charged with the committal of a crime. As to obtaining verdicts according to the evidence, we propose to abolish the jury system altogether (cries of 'Oh!' and laughter from the Irish benches) for certain classes of crime punishable by a certain length of imprisonment. We provide that two magistrates shall have summary jurisdiction, and a maximum power of inflicting six months' hard labor for the following offenses: criminal conspiracy, boycotting, rioting, offenses under the Whiteboy act, assaulting officers of law, taking forcible and unlawful possession (hear, hear, and cries of 'Oh! oh!'). While we do not propose to interfere with the liberty of the press, we hope that by giving power of summary conviction for inciting to commit offenses, we may prevent the press from being sharers in these crimes. (Hear, hear.) We borrow from the act of 1882 this provision:

" ' And if the Attorney-General for Ireland shall certify that a fairer trial can be held in some other place in Ireland, the High Court shall direct that the trial shall be held at that other place.'

(Ministerial cheers, and oh, oh, from the Irish benches.) But we add this limitation and qualification—that if the prisoner can show that a fair trial is not to be held in the other place, he shall have the power to represent to the Court to that effect, and the Court shall have power to direct accordingly (laughter from the Irish benches). We also give power to the defendant or the Attorney-General to have a special jury in any case, in certain cases thus assimilating the criminal practice to the civil practice both of England and Ireland. But if these things are not enough to secure a fair trial, what expedient are we to adopt?"

A VOICE—"Send them to Belfast."

Mr. BALFOUR—"The possibility that a fair trial cannot be got in any part of Ireland is enhanced by the further consideration that even if a fair trial could be got it might be at the cost of the lives and property of the jurymen. We consider it an unfair burthen to cast on the shoulders of men arbitrarily chosen—the whole burthen of preserving the fabric of law and order in Ireland. We have been, therefore, obliged to devise some means by which the gravest class of offenders can be tried otherwise than by a jury in any part of Ireland. The methods by which the right honorable gentleman, the member for Derby, attempted to meet this difficulty was by having trial by judges without juries. We prefer retaining, as far as we can, the principle of the jury system so long as it can be applied with some hope of obtaining a fair verdict. We, therefore, under certain limitations, propose that the Attorney-General for England and Ireland may certify that a fair trial can be had in England, and then the trial may be held in England. (Cries of 'What part of England,' 'Why be held in England,' and 'Aldershot,' and laughter.) The part is to be named in the certificate. We are aware that, under certain circumstances, it might be a hardship to a prisoner to be tried in England, from the fact that he would not be able to convey his witnesses (oh, oh), his solicitor, and his counsel from Ireland. Therefore, we provide in the bill that Irish counsel should be allowed to practice in the English courts (Home Rule iron-

ical cheers), and also that the State shall provide the necessary funds (hear, hear). We have provided that the provisions which I have read shall only have application in those districts which are proclaimed by the Lord Lieutenant (Oh! oh!) We hope we have made adequate provision for securing that the courts shall give verdicts according to the evidence. We have clauses which deal, as we think, with the case of dangerous associations. The Lord Lieutenant in Council will have power in certain limitations, which I shall presently describe, to make it an offense against this act to have anything to do with an association formed for the commission of crime, or for the carrying on of operations for the commission of crime, or for encouraging or aiding persons to commit crime, or promoting or inciting to acts of violence or intimidation, or for interfering with the administration of law, or disturbing the maintenance of law and order (laughter). When the Lord Lieutenant has issued a proclamation he may choose certain specified districts in which the proclamation is to have effect. ('What about the length of time?') Quite so, as I have explained to the House, we propose that the action of the bill may be limited in point of space. *We do not propose it should be limited in point of time* (loud Ministerial cheers)."

"This is the only Coercion Bill," says an ex-Home Secretary, "that has ever been proposed as perpetual."

"It is proposed in the interests of Ireland and of Liberty!" defiantly says Mr. Balfour.

What is the secret of a bill that evokes such burning words from English and Irish representatives? English Tories and Liberals, up to the present, at least, are represented by men who belong to the same class, educated in the same schools, having apparently a similar interest. Why, then, the wide mental and moral gulf between them, as shown by this bill?

Is it not because the Tories are legislating for their own class, while the Liberals are trying to legislate for the Empire?

Ireland is not fighting England now; she is in deadly grips with the belated saurian of aristocracy.

Like this, all former Coercion Bills for Ireland have been landlord bills. The two million new voters enfranchised in 1885 make the common people of England a political power for the first time. Up to that date the "English Commons," meaning Parliament, was a misnomer. Henceforth it is a tremendous fact.

For England, the landlords and aristocrats have not learned much in two centuries; for Ireland, they have learned nothing—or worse, they have increased their ignorance.

The truth is that England has evolved a vast social and political mistake in allowing the nobility and landed gentry to grow into immeasurable preponderance in the making of law.

To bring things to an equilibrium between the thirty-five mill-

ions who till the land and fill the cities, and the less than ten thousand who own the entire surface of the Three Kingdoms, cities and all, and to do this without a violent or anarchical period, is the greatest problem of the age; for it involves not only English interests, but touches the lines that subtend the property-laws of the civilized world.

All other European governments, within a hundred years, except England, have run the eraser of eminent domain over landlord boundaries.

England is face to face with an Abstract Idea that can no longer be held down by statute laws or systems of popular education in the hands of squires.

About 700 men own three-fifths of Ireland. Have they a right to evict and banish an industrious and peaceable population of nearly five millions?

Twenty-two men own nearly the entire land of Scotland. Have they a right to banish the whole Scottish people from their native land?

The law of the land, or, rather, of the landlord, answers, "Yes; they have that right." The people of England, Scotland, and Ireland, and of all countries, say in their hearts, "It is wrong."

But how shall the "wrong" be placed on the law-books in place of the "right?" And how shall this year's "justice" become next year's "crime" for the lawyers and the national schools?

"If landlordism be wrong for Ireland," said a leading Tory, recently, "it must also be wrong for England." This man laid his finger on the bare nerve.

This is the problem immediately before England. In her own borders, the landlord aristocrat, even though Norman at first, long ago became bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh. Intermittently, at least, the heart-beats of England's classes and masses are in accord.

In Ireland the landlords and tenants are two bodies with ever discordant pulsations. The stranger in Ireland has remained a stranger. He went as a spoiler, and he has held on as a master. "English dominion commenced in a spirit of conquest, and it continues in a spirit of exclusion."

All legislation for Ireland, for seven centuries, has been wholly by and in the interest of the men who became landlords, whether

by conquest, royal grant, or purchase. Two hundred years ago, the Lords Justices of England (State Papers, Ireland Record office, London) wrote : “ Where the land goes, there will go the interest of a kingdom ; and it must be a great mistake in policy, when there is so justifiable a pretense (as the fomented Irish “ Rebellion” of 1688), to lose the opportunity of changing the proprietors from Papists to Protestants as this will be.”

“ Ireland,” says William Hewitt (Aris. of Eng., page 272), “ in the very beginning of our connection with her, was an aristocratical conquest and booty. From the reign of Henry II. to this hour, that fair island has been treated as a conquered country. At all times when the oppressed Irish have risen to assert their right to their own soil and to their freedom, by our superior might and unmitigated cruelty they have been rebranded by the fires of their blazing huts, and rebaptized in their own blood, as our serfs and slaves. We have robbed them of their lands, of their churches, of the government of their towns and country ; we have sent over swarms of aristocrats to take possession of the estates of their ancient families ; and hoards of parsons to occupy their churches and devour the tithes that had been given by their fathers for the maintenance of their own religion. From age to age they have been insulted, trodden on, thrust out of their own soil and their own offices, and taunted with being ‘ alien in blood, in language, and religion ! ’ Great God ! ” exclaims this honest Englishman, “ What business had we there ? What business had we with their lands, their churches, their endowments ? If we went as Christians to convert them, were violence, and robbery, and injustice the means ? If we went to rule them, was it to be only by insult and slaughter ? If we went to bind Green Erin to Britannia as a sister, was it to be only as an erring sister, whose fortune is to be flung on the streets and frowned on in her misery ? In whatever character we pretended to go there, our eyes full of vengeance and our hands full of chains and plunder, betrayed us to the whole wide world as thieves and hypocrites.”

No Irishman need repeat things so thoroughly said by Englishmen. Here are Mr. Gladstone’s words in his address to the miners of North Britain on April 9 : “ For Ireland this new coercion is a question of suffering—and she knows how to suffer. For England, it is a question of shame and dishonor.”

It is not necessary to go over the sickening details of coercion in Ireland in former centuries. For present illustration the record since the Union, in 1800, is sufficient.

"This bill is proposed in the interests of Liberty!" said the Tory defender of Coercion the other day. No wonder he was laughed at. But the Union was carried on the same cry—and eighty-seven years of incredible oppression since then is no laughing matter.

In those eighty-seven years, all nations in Europe have largely increased in population and well-being—except Ireland. She has grown weaker and poorer. The mills that used to grind on her innumerable water-falls have rotted into the streams. The mineral treasures have remained buried beneath her silent fields. The grass grows in the streets of her cities. The mouths of her navigable rivers have been allowed to fill up with the washings of the unprotected banks. The untold wealth of her sea fisheries has been used by other nations, and her own fishermen have starved on the strand, unable to purchase nets or boats, there being no way to get their fish to market.

The highways of commerce round other lands have been filled with sails, and their ports with merchandise, but Ireland, the best placed country in the world for commercial prosperity, is shunned by all traders. Her great bays of deep water are empty as a savage shore; and her intelligent and industrious population, starved out from their own fat and fertile fields, have streamed away like life-blood, enriching other lands with their strength and morality.

But the cruel hands that gripped their lives and their earnings at home have not yet let go. The Irish emigrant is not free from Ireland when he leaves her shore—he only "drags a lengthening chain." His earnings in America and Australia are still, through his affection, mortgaged to the Irish landlord. The enormous rents of Ireland are mainly paid from the wages of Irish-Americans. From the city of Boston alone, last year, the amount sent to Ireland in small sums was \$560,000. This stream of liquid gold is flowing from every city and village in this and other countries; and one shrinks from even an estimation of its possible extent.

"For Ireland's sake, and for law and order," was the shibboleth of the Union in 1800. When that crime was consummated,

the Irish nation became an English estate, divided among a few hundred owners. The "law and order" began in blood—in the hanging of Robert Emmet in 1803, and it has held on its deadly course through repeated famines, galloping bankruptcy, feverish rebellions, and a dwindling population.

Almost from the first day of the Union Ireland has been ruled with the law of Bedlam or a menagerie. There has been no decent attempt even to give her the poor chance to which her one-sided bond entitled her. Says the author of "Fifty Years of Concessions to Ireland :" "The chronic poverty of the tenants made no impression on the landlords. The land was their own, and they were entitled to do what they liked with it—such was their view. The relation of landlord and tenant was to them a mere monetary transaction. To get as much money out of the land without putting any into it ; to spend that money wherever and however they pleased ; and to leave the tenants unhelped, un-educated, and unadvised, this was the Irish proprietor's notion of the functions and uses of a landed gentry."

The Irish landlords have had, since the Union, the completest power over their unfortunate tenants. Eviction was "a sentence of death," as Mr. Gladstone said. The evicted farmer could find no other farm; there were no other industries to employ himself or his children. There was nothing before him but emigration, or the poor-house and the grave.

To help the evictors and overawe the people, the eighty-seven years of the "United Kingdoms" have seen as many Coercion Acts for Ireland. Here is a shocking list of the Coercion Acts that have been in force in Ireland between 1800 and 1887 :

1800	Insurrection Act, Habeas Corpus	1819
1801	Suspension Act, Martial Law.	1820
1802		1821
1803	Insurrection Act, Habeas Corpus	1822
1804	Suspension Act.	1823
1805		1824
1806		1825
1807		1826
1808		1827
1809	Insurrection Act, Martial Law.	1828
1810		1829
1811		1830
1812		1831
1813		1832
1814		1833
1815	Insurrection Act, Martial Law.	1834
1816		1834
1817		1835
1818		

1835		1864	
1836		1865	— Peace Preservation Act.
1837	Power granted Lord Lieutenant	1866	
1838	to issue Special Trial Commiss-	1867	Habeas Corpus suspended.
1839	sions.	1868	
1840		1869	
1841		1870	Peace Preservation Act.
1842		1871	
1843		1872	
1844	Arms Act.	1873	
1845		1874	
1846		1875	
1847	Crime and Outrage Act.	1876	Peace Preservation Act, Protec-
1848	Crime and Outrage (Continu-	1877	tion of Life and Property Act.
1849	ance) Act.	1878	
1850		1879	
1851		1880	
1852		1881	Forster's Coercion Act.
1853		1882	
1854		1883	
1855		1884	The Crimes Act.
1856	Peace Preservation Act.	1885	
1857		1886	
1858		1887	— The Crimes Act.
1859			
1860	Peace Preservation (Continu-		
1861	ance) Act.		
1862			
1863			

What need to arraign or argue against a record like this? It stands condemned on sight. It is shocking to civilization and Christianity. And this dreadful legislation has been leveled against an unarmed and unorganized population, with a criminal record lighter than than of England or Scotland.

During those eighty-seven woeful years for Ireland all this arbitrary power has been wielded and directed by aliens ignorant of the people and heedless of their feelings and desires. The Coercion laws have been enforced by the bayonets of two standing armies—fourteen thousand constabulary and an average say of forty-five thousand soldiers—for whose support the Irish people are taxed, while even the material contracts for this support are controlled by English houses.

For the control of these forces and machines of coercion, a special class of garrison officials has been created. These men are vested with all privileges, which are taken away from the bulk of the population. The line used to be wholly drawn at religion, for this was useful in case of revolt. "A religious war" excites little outside sympathy. Religious riots in Ireland were the most available pretext and excuse for coercive rule; and the Orange garrison kept the stock full with at least one fresh riot a year.

But the fact that the most honored names in the Irish patriotic

list, from Grattan to Emmet, and from Emmet to Mitchel and Parnell, are the names of Protestants, proves that the Irish people have never raised the religious question unless religion struck them a political blow.

The introduction of Catholics into the ranks of judges and magistrates of late years has indicated no change of policy. The Government made sure that the selected Catholic either was, or was willing to become, antagonistic to the people. And even thus selected, Ireland, with four million Catholics, has only 800 Catholic magistrates, and, with one million Protestants, has 3,300 Protestant magistrates.

To these irresponsible hands the power of the Coercion Law is given. Ex-Chief Secretary Trevelyan (a Liberal Unionist until the Coercion Bill and its officers filled him with dismay) condemns the bill of his colleagues as aiming not at criminals but politicians, as a weapon placed in the hands of notorious Orange partisans like Attorney-General Holmes and Under-Secretary King-Harman, who can strike down at will their opponents, the people's representatives.

The remedial legislation in the shape of a Land Bill, which is to follow the Coercion Bill, will come from the same hands. Its first proposal is that of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, that the tenant-farmers of Ireland be relieved by passing *en masse* through the Bankruptcy Court ! The mixture of sarcasm and dishonor in this plaster for Ireland's wounds is worthy of its origin.

Ireland accepts the Coercion without flinching. For the first time there is light behind the bill. There is a voice beyond the cloud, and an assurance. "This bill is poison !" says Mr. Gladstone ; "it must be presented to the lips of Ireland by other hands than mine. It is a bill aimed at a nation. It is not intended to suppress crimes known to the law; but it is a bill that makes things crimes that never were crimes."

"The eternity that is written on this law will soon disappear before a brighter time," said Mr. Parnell.

But the Coercion Bill calls for violent retaliation from Ireland. "War must be met with war," says an indignant English member of Parliament, Mr. Labouchere ; "at all costs it must be demonstratively proved that Ireland cannot be ruled by coercion. If it be necessary, secret societies must replace the constitutional associations which the Government is trying to suppress. If the

Government uses arms of despotism to crush out liberty, the people must reply by the use of those means which oppressed nationalities have ever had at their command, and have ever used in their struggles for their rights."

Had an Irishman used such words he would be in prison before their echo died. But the Coercion Bill compels Irishmen to think such thoughts as well as Englishmen.

Still the last resort of a nation is not yet presented to Ireland. On the contrary, instead of violent action, her policy under coercion is *deliberate inaction*. If the coercionists can only drive her to *do something*, they have gained a point. If she hangs back in the traces, refuses to move forward or backward, she will be the toughest problem Coercion ever puzzled over.

Instead of going into bankruptcy, as Mr. Chamberlain advises them, if the 500,000 tenant-farmers of Ireland will hold on to their "plan of campaign," paying no rent, taking no vacant farms, accepting no terms of purchase over five or six years' rental, they will defeat the coercionists by the very bankrupt threat invented for the peasant. The old landlord trick of dragooning the people into a revolt of despair is quite played out. The Irish people are united as they never were before. Even the expatriated millions, and tens of millions of several generations, are bound up in the unity of this unexampled moral nationality. The Catholic bishops and clergy of Ireland are as one man with the people; and the word they speak to England is one of peace and reason. On the 16th of February, 1886, the archbishops and bishops of Ireland assembled in Dublin, and addressed a letter to Mr. Gladstone, saying that it was their firm and conscientious conviction "that Home Rule alone can satisfy the wants and wishes, as well as the legitimate aspirations, of the Irish people." And the prelates added :

"We are fully satisfied that the demand for Home Rule thus put forward in no way transgresses the constitutional limits marked out by you. Its concession cannot trench either on 'the supremacy of the Crown' or on 'the unity of the Empire'; nor can it interfere with the maintenance of all the authority of Parliament necessary for the consolidation of that unity. . . . As regards the settlement of the land question, we have no hesitation in saying that this cannot be better effected than by the purchase by the Government of the landlord interest in the soil, and the reletting of the latter to tenant-farmers at a figure very considerably below the present judicial rents."

So the shameful and cruel experiment of the landlords, though

foredoomed, must still be witnessed. A passionate and distinguished English Radical advised the Irish people to "declare the evictors to be lepers, and treat them as lepers." But it is better to let the declaration come from themselves. They are summing up their inhumanity in the view of the world. They are filling a deadly cup for Ireland which they themselves shall drink to the dregs in England. They blindly repudiate peasant purchase to make way for peasant repudiation. Oppression has outlived rebellion, but it cannot outlive contempt. Civilization could endure aristocratic landlordism while it was only an injustice, but must cast it out when it has become a nuisance.

Crime will increase in Ireland under this forcing process ; it cannot be helped. In one way it is even a necessity. " You cannot fight oppression with rosewater," writes Labouchere. But before the evil goes too deep it will undoubtedly be stopped. It is not in the nature of things that this lawless law, carried on bayonets and decreed by unjust justices, should be long-lived.

Meanwhile, " the true means of reconciling an old enmity," says an able Irish representative, " and of consolidating for yet greater glory a vast and powerful empire, have been found by the statesman whose name will be honored in Ireland and in England forever."

JOHN BOYLE O'REILLY.